

Report of the President of the Dalhousie Computer Science Society

John A. Doucette, President, Summer and Fall Terms, 2008

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1 Introduction

This document shall serve as the report of the Dalhousie Computer Science Society (hereafter CSS) President (hereafter, “the President”) for the summer and fall terms of 2008. The document is in three portions. First, a chronological description of events occurring in both terms which may be relevant to future councils. Second, general advice for all of council, including initiatives that may be useful in the coming terms. Third, advice to future Presidents on the President’s role in council.

2 Chronological Events

2.1 Building Hours

In early may, just after the majority of the student body had left for the summer, the administration announced new hours for the Computer Science Building. This entailed switching from a 24 hours a day, 7 days a week timetable to a much more conservative 17 hour day. This appeared to have substantial impact on society members, and will be discussed in more detail below. The decision was authorized by the university’s VP Student Services, Dr. Bonnie Newman (See below), at the request of our Dean, Dr. Michael Shepherd, the head of Dalhousie Campus Security (Sandy MacDonald), and an additional person in charge of the university’s physical plant. The decision was made without input from students, or any person who would be affected. The decision was justified as a way to improve student “health and wellness” by promoting lifestyle choices that did not include late study schedules, and also for security reasons, since the single student guard at the door was deemed insufficient. A further reason supplied was the mess created by some students when they stayed late. Society members responded en masse, with entirely negative comments (upwards of 40 per day). A petition was created, and meetings were arranged between society representatives (the Treasurer and I), and Dr. Newman and Dr. Shepherd. Dr. Newman formally apologized for making the decision without student input,

but not for the patronizing reasons given for the closure, which many students found offensive (especially the “health and wellness”). Dr. Shepherd worked with Society to create a key-card system for all society members that helped ensure the responsibility of cardholders, while still providing 24 hour access to all CS and Informatics students who desire it. Dr Shepherd also promised that no decisions regarding the building would be made without student input in future. The system was fully implemented by September.

Additional information that may be relevant includes: No hard data was ever produced to support the administration’s decisions, even when pressed about it. Some of the sources relied upon (particularly security records from the front desk) are well known to be highly unreliable and to underestimate student usage of the space. Although building staff produced pictures of messes and damaged created by students, there was little evidence to suggest that any more mess was produced at night than during the day. Many society members believe that the decision did not coincide with an increase in the minimum wage (and by extension, the security staff’s salaries) without reason, but there is no hard evidence to support that view.

2.2 Other Topics

The remainder of the summer was comparatively uneventful. I served as DSU rep for computer science students in the absence of a VP External, and did my best to represent the interests of students at the DSU council. I was concerned by the new DSU executive’s disregard for formalities, ethics regulations, transparency, and views on how the DSU should be managed, (primarily with respect to the President), but was also impressed by the ability of the executive to get things done and the amount of work they did. I found the interests of the society were often best served by aligning myself with the engineering, commerce, and graduate reps, as well as Eric Snow, the Senate representative who holds considerable sway within the council.

Near the end of the summer I helped to organize the Faculty’s orientation event. Poor coordination meant that the event was not advertised to the incoming first year students until far later than in previous years. In future, paper letters should be sent to all incoming students, (including transfer students and graduate students) telling them about the event well before hand. Emails should also be sent.

The fall term was largely dominated by SNOBOL, the society’s annual formal dinner, dance and awards ceremony. SNOBOL’s price was a source of constant worry for society. Future councils are advised to set aside a small portion of their budget each term to pay for the event. The council also opted to created a Geekbeer manager position to ease the burden on the social rep, allowing us to offer more diverse events.

The fall term ended with an election in which no person received enough nominations to run. For this reason (and others), I must advise future councils not to formally disband until a new council has been elected.

Throughout this period, I also drafted a series of constitutional amendments,

which failed to pass in the fall term due to insufficient voter turnout, and was not presented again in the winter elections. Many of these amendments are quite important, and should be put before the electorate again soon. I also worked on the creation of a faculty specific grad ring with Andrew Shouldice, Andrew Aikens, and Classique Rings. I am pleased to report that the first prototypes have already been produced, and that the ring should be for sale in April.

3 Advice For Council

3.1 People

One of the largest losses of institutional memory suffered by society during each transition is the information about people. As such, I have compiled a list of people society ought to know about, and things that ought to be know about them:

The Dean

Dr. Shepherd is the current Dean of the faculty. He is very approachable, easy to work with, and should be consulted with at least once a term, just so that the faculty and the society are on the same page. Appointments can be made though his secretary, Anne Publicover. The Dean is a subscriber to the society council mailing list, and an honorary member of the society.

David Green

Dave Green is the man in charge of tech support. As with the Dean, Dave is very friendly and good to work with, but society must be respectful of both his staff and the equipment lent to them (which has been a problem in the past). This means that if something is borrowed, it must be returned, and that society members should make requests, not issue demands. Society members should contact Dave if they need to borrow technical equipment for an event, or want to do anything involving the faculty systems or servers. Dave's Office is on the 3rd floor in Tech Support.

Daniel Boyle

Dan Boyle is the current VP internal of the DSU. Dan should be contacted to mediate disputes over elections, if the society has legal problems (as the DSU has a lawyer we can use), or if there are issues pertaining to Dalhousie Societies that affect the CSS. Dan's office is on the second floor of the student union building.

Mark Coffin

Mark is the current VP education of the DSU. Mark should be contacted if the society wants to bring a speaker in and needs help finding space and/or

advertising the event. Mark's office is on the second floor of the student union building.

Courtney Larkin

Courtney is the current President of the DSU. Courtney should be contacted about serious issues affecting students (e.g. building hour changes) that involve the university administration. Courtney is professional, and has lots of experience in dealing with issues like this. Her office is on the second floor of the student union building.

Eric Snow

Eric is a current Senate Rep. for the DSU. Eric holds tremendous sway in the council, and has many connections to the CS Society, having previously served as its VP External. Eric can usually be found at or after DSU council meetings.

Dr. Bonnie Newman

Dr. Bonnie Newman is the current VP of Student Services at Dalhousie. I find some of her policies and views to be patronizing towards students, and her reputation as a union buster (much of which is likely untrue) make me worry about her. She is also the person who ultimately signed away 24 hour access to the CS building without consulting students. That said, she has the best interest of the student body as a whole at heart, and many of her initiatives are actually very good ideas. Future society members will likely not have to deal with her unless administrative decisions adversely affect them. If this is the case I recommend preparing a strong argument beforehand, and making the best case possible. If all else fails, seeking media attention may give you leverage.

Rosemary Bully

Rosemary Bully is in charge of alumni relations for the faculty. She is very good at getting corporate sponsorship for society events, and willing to work with society on many initiatives. Rosemary's office is on the 4th floor of the Computer Science Building.

3.2 Ideas

- The society should elect executive members to one year terms. This would allow much better long term planning while still allowing the flexibility for non-executive members to volunteer on a term by term basis.
- The society should aim to offer events and ideas beyond geekbeer. Many of these events will not be successful, but when society focuses on geekbeer to the exclusion of other events, it alienates many of its members.

- The society should consider long term investments in order to mitigate the effect of enrollment volatility on cash flow. This measure will likely be unpopular since most current students would not revise the benefits, but it has been done elsewhere. A small (e.g. \$0.05) “tax” on geekbeer sales would generate significant revenue for such a project without causing as many problems.
- The society should consider hiring a society desk manager once a year instead of every term. This would help the desk staff transitions considerably.
- The society should offer intramural teams free T-shirts to encourage participation. The intramural team of the year award should be given out each year (there’s a plaque in the cage).
- Society should create an orientation guide for first year students, including information on how to obtain 24 hour building access.
- Society should lobby for all first year students to be given key-cards granting 24 hour access to the building in first year, and for all students to be required to provide the deposit, as this can help foster an even stronger sense of community among students.

3.3 Advice

- Plan for SNOBOL well in advance. The summer council usually doesn’t have much to do, so planning should start in July. Funding from sponsors can be obtained much more easily when there’s lots of time.
- Orientation should also be organized in July. Letters should be sent to students at that time or earlier.
- The council should avoid sending email to the membership except when absolutely necessary. An additional mailing list (cssevents@cs.dal.ca?) should be created to reduce the load on csannounce and allow council to maintain a communications line with its membership.
- Alcohol prices **MUST NOT BE ADVERTISED**. This is already becoming a problem. Council must read and understand the university alcohol policy, and abide by it, or risk loosing its liquor license for a prolonged period. This would in no way serve the interests of our membership.

4 Advice for Future Presidents

- The President’s job is to lead council and represent the society. There are more formal duties outlines in the constitution (which you should read), but they matter far less than the core idea.

- The President's job can entail answering up to 2 hours of email correspondence every day, and doing more than that in a time of crisis. You should delegate much of the work resolving these issues when the email volume becomes heavy, or you will be quickly overwhelmed.
- The President and Executive should do most of the work forming council's policy, and planning events. The council meeting should be a place to approve or deny proposals, not debate them at length. Setting clear goals for each executive member can help greatly in getting things done, and having regular executive-only meetings will as well.
- The President should strive to represent the interests of society members to people external to the society. This means setting aside personal views for the most part.
- The President should not take more than 4 courses above the second year. The work load is infeasible.